1: Maes--1 E-5 (1913-1914) 1924 FO32 Mongo FO32

[5] Chapter 1

The Land and Its Inhabitants

The appearance of the land. -- Location of the tribes. -- General characteristics of the natives. -- Maternal feelings. -- The fetisher. -- Religious beliefs. -- Cult of the dead. -- The Mfumu. -- Medicine.

[37] The area between the Congo, the Kasai, and the Kwango is covered with tall grass interspersed with stunted trees and a few small forests whose verdant canopy rises majestically over a boundless plain. A curtain of trees stretches along the rivers and gradually thins out as one penetrates into the interior. The path [38?] beaten by the regular passage of endless columns of natives, walking Indian file, winds sadly and monotonously across these lightly rolling plains. During the rainy season the grass, whose stems grow as high as two or two and a half meters, obstructs the view. During the dry season, destroyed by brush fires, it has given way to a blackish-yellow plain from which all life seems to have been [5?] banished. From time to [6] time, at distances of 30 and sometimes 40 kilometers apart, we find groupings of huts, surrounded by a few manioc fields, [Fig. 1 appears here] banana groves, and sometimes small plots of maize and peanuts. Upon our arrival, [40?] the men look at us without concern, the mistrustful women hide [Fig. 2 appears here] in their huts or take refuge in the forest and fields, and the less timid children stare at us with the innocence characteristic of their age. [7]

Beyond the Kasai, in the region of the Fimi, around Lake Leopold II, and along the Lukenie, the bush gives way to the forest, damp, swampy, dark, and mysterious.

[37] At the confluence of the Fimi and the Kasai, a vast swampy [36] area stretches as far as the eye can see, bare of all arborescent vegetation, crossed by innumerable channels which are narrow and shallow during the dry season and wide to the point of covering practically the whole region during the rainy season.

[text continues on p. 8]

gravity of the situation. In general, the wife's parents judge impartially, because they value the stability of the marriage. If the husband feels that he has been wronged, he can always appeal to the ndonga, but ordinarily there is no need to do so and the matter is settled in a friendly fashion and in private. If the woman is found to be in the wrong, her parents scold her and take her to task. Provided with some gift (two or three bakonga, for example), they return her to her husband, advising her to behave in a more suitable fashion in the future. Should she resist, her parents will not hesitate to use threats and curses, and these seldom fail to have their effect. Nowadays women have become more emancipated, and it does sometimes happen that such a woman will scorn her parents' decision, especially if she has a lover somewhere beyond the reach of family justice. If it is the husband who is in the wrong, his wife will not go back with him until he has begged her to do so by paying a few copper rings or other valuables, the amount depending on the seriousness of the situation. This act on the husband's part is expressed by the verb bonda [271] and the noun bondo, terms which do not apply specifically to this case only but are used whenever pardon is asked for a serious offense. This payment is not a fine or indemnity; it is more closely equivalent to the apologies and retractions customary among Europeans.

At the present time some women go back to their families for very slight reasons. Freedom and a greater ease of communication, together with a desire for emancipation, which is no longer held back by the rein of ancestral sanctions, are the cause for this state of affairs. They are still held back somewhat by the risk of a rupture of the marriage, a possibility which they generally would rather not see realized, especially if the bride price is quite large.

In the past, if a woman was married a short distance away from her parents, she could always run away to them when there were domestic disputes. Even if the route led through other villages, it was always possible to take a direct path through the forest, for such paths exist everywhere; they go around the villages in between so that, in case of conflict or danger of assassination, a traveler can go his way without being seen. When a woman was married into a